

THE IBIS.

NEW SERIES.

No. XXIII. JULY 1870.

XXI.—*On the Birds of Novaya Zemlya.*

By GEORGE GILLET, F.Z.S.

IT is with some hesitation that I venture to submit this short notice of the birds observed by me during a trip to Novaya Zemlya to the readers of 'The Ibis.' In the first place, the expedition which I joined was in no way organized for scientific purposes, being simply a sporting trip for hunting the White Bear, Walrus, and Seal; and Spitsbergen being, at any rate as regards the first two animals, nearly exhausted, we determined to try the less known and less disturbed hunting-grounds of Novaya Zemlya. In the second place, we were all rather sportsmen than naturalists, though I have always been more or less a collector of birds, and have had a good many years' experience in Norway of the commoner Northern species. Besides this, we were unavoidably delayed in starting by the amount of fitting and strengthening required by our vessel, so that instead of leaving Norway, as we had originally intended, in the beginning of May, it was the 4th of July before we embarked at Tromsö, and the 17th of that month before we sighted land. The unknown and dangerous nature of the coast, the absence of any correct charts, and the generally stormy and foggy weather we met with during the whole cruise prevented our getting on shore, except on some few occasions; so that my opportuni-

ties of observation were necessarily very limited, and consequently I can offer but a meagre and incomplete account of the ornithology of this wild and desolate region. I will endeavour, however, to give as correct a list as possible of the birds actually observed by me, though about some, as will be noted, I am a little doubtful; and I will also append a few remarks on the habits and localities of some of the species. Since the year 1837, when Dr. von Baer* explored these islands, I believe no naturalist has visited them; and he does not appear to have gone further north than Matthew's Straits, which divide the Northern from the Southern Island. I imagine, however, from all I hear that the portion of the coast that he explored is the richest field for the ornithologist. We, unfortunately, had not time to visit this part. In the more northern part of the country, namely from Black Point, in lat. $75^{\circ} 33' N.$ to Cape Nassau, in rather more than lat. $76^{\circ} 30' N.$, where we first got among the ice, I saw merely the ordinary Arctic sea-birds, which have been so often described by various writers that I need not say very much about them.

? 1. *FALCO GYRFALCO*, Linn. Gyr-Falcon.

I saw two large Falcons, which I imagine were of the Norwegian form, flying over the ship by Vaigatz Island, at the entrance of the Kara Sea; both were in immature plumage; but I could not obtain a specimen.

? 2. *FALCO PEREGRINUS*, Gmel. Peregrine Falcon.

It is with great doubt that I record this species; but I will briefly relate the circumstances under which I believe I saw it, and my grounds for so considering it. While on shore in Matthew's Straits, on the 5th of August, a stormy wild day, with a gale blowing from the south-west and driving showers of sleet, my attention was aroused by the scream of a Falcon; and on climbing a rough hill overlooking a deep rocky ravine, I saw the old male bird fly from a stone some two hundred yards

* "Description of Animal Life in Nova Zembla. By K. E. von Baer." Ann. Nat. Hist. iv. pp. 145-154. [Translated from 'Archiv für Naturgeschichte,' 1839 (i. pp. 160-170), where the paper, originally published, under the title of "Vie animale à Nowaia Zemlia," in the 'Bull. Sc. de l'Acad. de St. Pétersb.' (iii. pp. 343-352) is reprinted.—ED.]

off. He was soon joined by the female, which came from the ravine, where she doubtless had her nest. They soared in wide circles high above me, but would not come within shot, and it was impossible to get nearer to the nest. From the short glimpse I got of the male's dark blue back and the reddish tinge which I fancied I could detect on his breast, I conjectured that these birds were Peregrine Falcons: but I am by no means confident on the point; and the suggestion which has since been made to me, that they were Gyr-Falcons, is very possibly true.

† 3. NYCTEA NIVEA (Daud.). Snowy Owl.

Very common all along the coast. I never saw this bird attempt to feed on blubber or carrion, indeed I never saw it on the ice at all; but it is possible that, in the winter, or when pressed by hunger, it may occasionally pick up offal, as Admiral von Wrangell has asserted*. My impression is that it lives a good deal on young sea-fowl and Arctic Foxes. Lemmings† no doubt are its favourite food; but I saw no traces of any great quantity of them in *Novaya Zemlya*, nor did I see a single live one. In some places, however, there were their burrows and a few dried remains. I shot three Snowy Owls in various localities. They were all remarkably fat, having a thick hard layer under the skin, answering to the blubber of a Seal. Their stomachs were empty.

* 'Narrative of an Expedition to the Polar Sea,' &c. (Sabine's translation) London: 1840, p. cxxiii; 2nd ed. 1844, p. 490.

† As an instance of its fondness for Lemmings, and showing how it follows these curious little animals in their migrations, I may mention that in the part of Norway where I was staying in 1868, there was a perfect plague of Lemmings—in the valley, in the forest, on the fjeld, they were squeaking and running about by thousands; during the autumn they travelled down to the fjord, and were drowned, as usually happens. A few stragglers remained till the spring of 1869; but eventually all disappeared. In the summer of that year more than a dozen young Snowy Owls were taken from different nests in the neighbourhood, and several Arctic Foxes were shot, both of which animals must have followed the army of Lemmings, and staid to breed in the district. I saw one Arctic Fox alive, which had been caught in the streets of Thronthjem.

4. *PLECTROPHANES NIVALIS* (Linn.). Snow-Bunting.

Very common wherever we landed.

+ 5. *HIRUNDO RUSTICA*, Linn. Chimney-Swallow.

On the morning of July 22nd a pair of these birds were seen flying round the ship as she lay at anchor in a small bay, in lat. $76^{\circ} 10'$ N. I was surprised to meet with them so far from their usual haunts; but I presume they would breed in the rocky cliffs. No more were seen in any part of Novaya Zemlya.

+ 6. *EUDROMIAS MORINELLUS* (Linn.). Dotterel.

On the 5th of August, at Matthew's Straits, I saw an old bird of this species, with a nearly full-grown young one, which latter I shot. I subsequently saw some more by a river on the eastern side.

+ 7. *ÆGIALITIS HIATICULA* (Linn.). Ringed Plover.

I saw several families of these birds in Matthew's Straits, and also on the eastern side.

+ 8. *TRINGA MARITIMA* (Linn.). Purple Sandpiper.

Very common both in Matthew's Straits and on the eastern coast. One came on board during a storm in the Kara Sea, and I caught it in my hand. When released it did not offer to fly away, and staid on board about two days; but it succumbed to the fearful weather and heavy rain, and I found it lying dead and drenched under one of the boats.

+ 9. *STERNA MACRURA*, Naum. Arctic Tern.

Tolerably numerous both on the western and eastern coasts.

+ 10. *PAGOPHILA EBURNEA* (Phipps). Ivory-Gull.

I did not see any breeding-places of this species; and though it was very numerous wherever there was ice, I could not detect any but adult birds. I have frequently seen it settle on the water (*cf.* Ibis, 1865, p. 507).

+ 11. *RISSA TRIDACTYLA* (Linn.). Kittiwake.

This species is common all along the coast.

12. *LARUS GLAUCUS*, Gmel. Glaucous Gull.

Plentiful everywhere; it does not seem to confine itself to the

ice so much as many of the other birds; we found it all along the coast, both on the eastern and western sides.

+ 13. *STERCORARIUS POMATORHINUS* (Temm.). Pomatorhine Skua.

+ 14. *STERCORARIUS PARASITICUS* (Linn.). Richardson's Skua.

+ 15. *STERCORARIUS LONGICAUDUS*. Vieillot. Buffon's Skua.

The first of these three species was by no means so common as the two latter, but it was still tolerably abundant. The other two were very numerous, both on the west coast and in the Kara Sea. I saw them in all stages of plumage, from the dark-brown of the younger birds to the fine delicate colouring of the adults. Every flock of Kittiwakes was attended by numbers of these birds, swooping at them like Hawks, and obliging them to disgorge their prize. The fish on which these Gulls were feeding were those called by the Norwegian fishermen *Lodde*, and are the favourite food of the Cod. I am not acquainted with their English or scientific name*.

+ 16. *PROCELLARIA GLACIALIS*, Linn. Fulmar.

This bird is a constant attendant on ships in the Arctic seas. Its flight is exactly like that of a Woodcock, as it skims over the waves with its large bright eye constantly peering into the water for the chance of blubber. It is easily caught with a baited hook, and when placed on deck is quite unable to rise or even to stand upright, but shuffles along by the help of its wings. It will readily eat blubber, however, directly it is caught, and when thrown overboard will come again at the hook without the least hesitation. It never, so far as I know, settles on flat ice; on one occasion only did I see one on the sloping side of an iceberg; usually it is on the wing or sitting on the water.

+ 17. *CEPPHUS MANDTI* (Licht.)? Dovekie.

A Black Guillemot is very common everywhere, and is most likely of the northern form; but not then knowing of the supposed existence of more than one, I did not examine any specimens.

* [According to Prof. Nilsson (Skan. Faun. iv. p. 441), the "*Lodde*" is *Osmerus arcticus* (Fabr.).—ED.]

- + 18. *URIA BRUENNICHII*, Sabine. Brünnich's Guillemot.
Common along the coast, breeding in all the cliffs.

- + 19. *MERGULUS ALLE* (Linn.). Little Auk.

Tolerably numerous, chiefly in the north. The peculiar cry of these birds had a very wild effect in the calm light nights, especially when mingled with the hoarse bellowings of the Walruses.

- + 20. *FRATERCULA GLACIALIS* (Leach)? Puffin.

I regret that I was not previously acquainted with the asserted distinctive characters of the Northern Puffin, I therefore cannot positively say that that was the species observed by me. It was not very common.

- ? 21. *COLYMBUS GLACIALIS*, Linn. Great Northern Diver.

22. *COLYMBUS ARCTICUS*, Linn. Black-throated Diver.

In the Kara Straits were several Divers; some, from their size, I took to be of the first-mentioned species, and on a small tarn in one of the islands I made out a pair of the second. No doubt *C. septentrionalis* is also to be found here, as stated by Dr. von Baer; but I did not see one to identify it.

- + 23. *BERNICLA BRENTA*, Steph. Brent-Goose.

Common in Matthew's Straits.

24. *ANSER SEGETUM*, Gmel.? Bean-Goose?

There were large flocks of grey Geese in Matthew's Straits and other places. One specimen was obtained by a boat's crew who were encamped; but I did not see it. I can only guess at the species, which may possibly prove to be *A. brachyrhynchus*. Dr. von Baer mentions a species of Swan as being found in Novaya Zemlya; but I did not see any, nor did I hear of them from the Walrus-hunters up there.

- ? 25. *ÆDESMIA NIGRA* (Linn.). Common Scoter.

In Schirochika Bay, at the extreme south of the island, I saw several small flocks of what I took for this species; but none having been obtained, I cannot speak with certainty on the point.

+26. *HARELDA GLACIALIS* (Linn.). Long-tailed Duck.

Common in Matthew's Straits, but I did not see them elsewhere.

+27. *SOMATERIA MOLLISSIMA* (Linn.). Eider-Duck.

Tolerably common all along the coast, but I did not see any large flocks of them.

+28. *SOMATERIA SPECTABILIS* (Linn.). King-Duck.

In Matthew's Straits on the 6th of August I saw several of these birds in small flocks, all apparently immature males. I shot two specimens: their wings were entirely destitute of quill-feathers, so that they could not fly; but they dived in a wonderful way, and were very difficult to get. They were apparently full-grown; but were dark brown on the head and back and blackish in places. The protuberance on the bill was of a rich orange, shading off on the bill itself to a pinkish flesh-colour; the irides dark.

This ends my list. We had intended on our way back to visit Kostin Schar, which is said to be a favourite resort of all kinds of birds; but it was the 5th of September before we left Schirochika Bay, and we thought it better to take advantage of a strong north-easterly breeze and steer for Norway, as the days were getting short and the nights dark, and there was no knowing how soon the ice might begin to form in the bays, though at that time they were perfectly open. I have no doubt a competent naturalist might find much to interest him in this desolate and little-visited region.

[** As Dr. Von Baer's paper, already mentioned, contains the only information hitherto known to us respecting the birds of Nova Zembla, it may be as well to remark that he mentions the appearance there of *twenty-four* species, *six* of which did not occur to our contributor. They are an "Adler" (Eagle), about which there may be, it is said, some mistake, *Streptopelia collaris*, *Larus canus*, *Lestris catarrhactes*, *Colymbus septentrionalis*, and *Cygnus musicus*. Of the rest, *two*, a "Falken" (*Falco*) and a *Procellaria*, were undetermined by Dr. von Baer, but are doubtless referable to species comprised in Mr. Gillett's list, as are *four* more, though assigned by the former to nearly allied

species. There are *Uria grylle*, *U. troile*, *Mormon fratercula*, and the "Saatgans" (*Anser segetum*), which, without much fear of error, may be regarded as identical with those numbered 17, 18, 20, and 24 of the present paper. The species unquestionably mentioned by both observers in common are *twelve*:—Nos. 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 19, 23, 26, 27, and 28 of our contributor's list, while to him alone we are indebted for the recorded fact of the appearance of *ten*—his Nos. 1 or 2, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 21, 22, and 25.—ED.]

XXII.—*Additional Notes on various Indian Birds.*

By R. C. BEAVAN, Bengal Staff Corps, C.M.Z.S.

[Concluded from 'The Ibis' for 1869, p. 426.]

254. UPUPA EPOPS. European Hoopoe.

THE Hoopoe has evidently the power of smelling grubs and worms that lie an inch or two below the surface of the ground. It is an interesting sight to watch one feeding. His bill appears to quarter every inch of the soil; and when a grub is discovered, down it goes deep into the ground, seizes the grub, which is then thrown into the air (Hornbill-like), caught, and swallowed.

I noticed a species of Hoopoe which was probably *U. longirostris*, Jerdon (B. Ind. i. p. 393), in Burmah, in August, 1865, on the banks of the river Salween, in the Tennaserim provinces, but had no opportunity of securing the specimen in question.

256. LANIUS LAHTORA. Indian Grey Shrike.

This species is particularly abundant about Umballah, where I procured several fine examples about the station in October 1866. I subjoin the dimensions, taken from two specimens in the flesh, the first in April, the second on the 23rd of October.

Length.	Wing.	Tail.	Tarsus.	Bill from front.	Bill from gape.	Spread foot.	Extent.
9.75	4.125	4.5	1.125	.7			13
9.875	4.125	4.875	1.125	.6875	1	1.25	13

Whilst on the subject of Grey Shrikes I may mention here that in the English channel, off the coast of Cornwall, a specimen of the Grey Shrike, *L. excubitor* of Europe, came on board the ship